The Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the gay men’s community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of gay men in the San Francisco Bay area, the United States, and the world.

GBF’s mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

APRIL / MAY 2013 NEWSLETTER

Journey to the Bodhi Tree

BY HARLEY SHAPIRO

Song of the Open Road

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road, 
Healthy, free, the world before me, 
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good fortune — I myself am good fortune. 
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing, 
Strong and content, I travel the open road.

—Walt Whitman

ON OCTOBER 11, 2011, I BEGAN A SIX-MONTH JOURNEY to India, Malaysia and Borneo. During 2010, I spent four months traveling through Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Bali and Indonesia. Over the years, I have been fortunate to study, volunteer, work, and live in many countries and cultures. I was able to participate in the joys and sorrows of local everyday life as well as celebrate festivals and sacred events.

My study of Buddhist teachings enhanced awareness, mindfulness, and joy while on the road. My adventures have enriched my understanding and insight into Buddhist teachings and practices. Every day illuminates the interconnection and interdependence of all of us. We are all teachers and students in sharing our experiences and lives.

I would like to share some photos of my visit to Bodh Gaya, India. I set out from Varanasi (Benares) and the Ganges River for the five-hour journey to Bodh Gaya. It was a long and bumpy “heat and dust” excursion rewarded by an amazing time at the Mahabodhi Temple, gardens, and town.

According to Buddhist tradition, about 500 BC, Prince Gautama Siddhartha, wandering as an ascetic, reached an area near the city of Gaya. After three days and nights of meditation, Siddhartha claimed to have attained enlightenment, insight, and the answers that he had sought. He then spent seven weeks at seven different spots in the area, meditating and considering his experience. After this time, he traveled to Sarnath, where he began teaching.

Disciples began to visit this place during the full moon in spring in the Hindu calendar. The place became known as Bodh Gaya, the day of enlightenment as Buddha Purnima, and the tree as the Bodhi Tree. Many Buddhist temples and monasteries have been built in the area surrounding the Main Temple by the people of Bhutan, China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Sikkim, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Tibet. These buildings reflect the architectural style—with both exterior and interior decorations—of their respective countries.

Bodh Gaya is a unique sacred and spiritual place where Buddhists and friends from all cultures meet, converse, reflect, meditate, practice, and celebrate. Enriched by the beauty and devotion of Buddhists of all traditions, this holy site is a powerful inspiration to the world. It may also be the most energetic, peaceful, and calm place in all of India.
“All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.”

—Martin Buber

“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.”

—Henry Miller

Meditation at the Bodhi Tree
“If travel is like love, it is, in the end, mostly because it's a heightened state of awareness, in which we are mindful, receptive, undimmed by familiarity and ready to be transformed. That is why the best trips, like the best love affairs, never really end.”

—Pico Iyer
Your Thrift Store
Donations Earn Money for GBF

GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over $800 through members’ generosity. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm, any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF. Our ID number is 40. Information: (415) 861-4910.

How to Reach Us

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Address changes or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the newsletter:
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GBF Newsletter  Send submissions to:
editor@gaybuddhist.org

GBF Yahoo Discussion Group
There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo. Join the discussion at:
www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship
Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12 noon. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (Look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets) MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block BART: 24th and Mission, walk 3 1/2 blocks PARKING: on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage The Center is handicapped accessible.

Sunday Speakers

April 7 Todd Ormsby
Todd Ormsby is a sociologist who studies both gay male culture and religion, and teaches comparative religion at San Jose State University. Most recently he has been researching people who choose to leave Mormonism and transition into some degree of “unbelief.” His deeper interests are in understanding how and why people change their personal religious practices and beliefs. He’s especially curious about what happens to individuals as they make those religious transformations—their emotions, their day-to-day lives, their perceptions of the world, and indeed, their very “Selves.” This interest has been shaped by his own life story: being raised in the Brighamite strand of Mormonism, exploring Kabbalah in university, settling into a Buddhist Vipassana practice, and ultimately converting to Judaism.

April 14 Small Group Discussion

April 21 Doug Von Koss
Doug is the Artistic Director of THE NOAH PROJECT, a men’s ritual performance group in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through a magical blend of chant, movement, poetry and ritual, Doug weaves a spell that encompasses the estatic, the sacred and the wise fool. He draws from many of the world’s religious traditions—Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish and Sufi—to create a glorious mosaic that is, above all else, a celebration of the human spirit.

April 27 Suvanna Cullen
Ordained in 2001 into the Western Buddhist Order, Suvarnaprabha (or Suvanna for short) is director of the San Francisco Buddhist Center and a writer. She teaches classes and retreats at the SFBC, workplace wellness and mindfulness based stress reduction at local businesses, and occasional meditation classes at the San Francisco county jail. Her humorous advice column, “Ask Auntie Suvanna,” was featured in Dharma Life, a British Buddhist magazine. Other writings have appeared in What Book?! Buddha Poems from Beat to Hiphop (1998) and Challenging Times: Stories of Buddhist Practice When Things Get Tough (2007).

May 5 Dale Borglum
Dale Borglum is the founder and Executive Director of The Living/Dying Project. He is a pioneer in the conscious dying movement and has worked directly with thousands of people with life-threatening illness and their families for over 30 years. In 1981, Dale founded the first residential facility for people who wished to die consciously in the United States, The Dying Center. He has taught and lectured extensively on the topics of spiritual support for those with life-threatening illness, care-giving as a spiritual practice, and healing at the edge—the edge of illness, of death, of loss, of crisis. Dale has a BS from UC Berkeley and a PhD from Stanford University. He is the co-author of Journey of Awakening: A Meditator’s Guidebook and has taught meditation for the past 35 years.

May 12 Harley Shapiro
Harley Shapiro has lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area since the mid-1960’s, attending university and teaching cultural anthropology. He is also a photo-journalist who has traveled extensively. He has been a member of the GFB Sangha for many years. Harley will share a digital slide presentation of his recent journey to India and South Asia, including visits to sacred Buddhist sites and festivals in Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Borneo, Penang, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and Tibetan communities. He will also share colorful images of the Bangalore, India GLBT pride parade and festival, World Aids Day, and the Queer Film Festival.

May 19 Lenny Pinna
Lenny Pinna is eclectic by nature, exemplified by his diverse experiences in theatre as a director, actor, playwright, dramaturg, dancer, puppeteer and educator. Since moving to the West coast ten years ago, he has expressed his creativity in painting, quilt making, poetry writing and performing as Lenya—the goddess-in-diva disguise! Lenny synthesizes the intellectual expansiveness of evolutionary consciousness expressed in Integral Yoga with-in-the-body practices of meditation, hatha yoga, Bodananza and other body movement systems. He particularly attunes himself to human relationships in terms of psychological self-examination, emotional intelligence, communication awareness and authenticity. At GFB, he will connect theory with experiential exercises in “Practicing Presence.”

May 26 Small Group Discussion
by the power and truth of this practice, may all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness, may all be free from sorrow and the causes of sorrow, may all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow, and may all live in equanimity, without too much attachment or too much aversion, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit